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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [IN](#) [PK](#) [NL](#)  
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: DAS GASTRIGHT'S MARCH 13  
VISIT TO THE HAGUE

Classified By: Ambassador Roland Arnall, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia John Gastright visited The Hague on March 13 for bilateral discussions on Afghanistan. Dutch interlocutors expressed satisfaction with their deployment in Uruzgan, but said increased insurgency activities have complicated reconstruction efforts. The Dutch government will decide by the end of the summer whether to pursue the possibility of maintaining a Dutch presence in Uruzgan in some capacity past its two-year deployment. They anticipate a tough political battle with parliament to approve any such extension. DAS Gastright outlined plans for the new USD 11.8 billion supplemental on Afghanistan, and stressed the importance of removing the conditions that foment extremism. He highlighted strategic communications and the Afghan reconciliation program, and also discussed eradication efforts and Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. DAS Gastright met with the Dutch interagency, Dutch parliamentarians and academics, and also participated in a press roundtable. End summary.

Dutch Interagency -- Going Well, But...

12. (U) Deputy Assistant Secretary Gastright attended a working lunch hosted by MFA Security Director Robert de Groot. Dutch attendees included MFA Deputy Director for Asia and Oceania Karel Hartogh, MFA Director for Human Rights and Peacebuilding Aart Jacobi, Foreign Affairs Advisor for the Prime Minister Marc Gerritsen, MOD Senior Policy Advisor for Afghanistan David van Weel, Deputy Taskforce Uruzgan Coordinator Dewi van de Weerd, and MFA Afghanistan Desk Officer Marit van Zomeren. USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator Mark Ward, Joint Chiefs of Staff Captain James Hirst, Defense Attache U.S. Embassy The Hague Captain Devon Goldsmith and political-military officer Jason Grubb attended on the U.S. side.

13. (C) De Groot reviewed the Dutch deployment in Afghanistan, noting new Cabinet members Foreign Minister Verhagen, Defense Minister van Middelkoop, and Development Minister Koenders will visit Afghanistan next week. He added that the parliamentary foreign affairs committee just returned from Afghanistan and Pakistan very impressed with Dutch efforts in Uruzgan. Nevertheless, while Dutch public support for its troops remains high, he said mission support is just below fifty percent. He reiterated the Dutch commitment to a

two-year deployment in Uruzgan until August 2008. He expected the Dutch government to make a decision on whether to maintain a Dutch presence in Afghanistan by the end of the summer. However, any extension will require a difficult, uphill political battle with parliament this coming fall, he said, centering on the viability of reconstruction efforts, burden-sharing among allies, and President Karzai's strategy -- or lack thereof -- in the southern provinces.

¶4. (C) Jacobi outlined Dutch reconstruction efforts, noting that seventy percent of Dutch assistance goes through the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund and the Law and Order Trust fund. Jacobi said money was not a problem; the real obstacle was capacity at the local level to carry out projects, and finding NGOs to partner with on the ground. He acknowledged that for security reasons, the Dutch opt not to publicize their partnerships with NGOs for fear of reprisal attacks upon the NGOs by the Taliban -- this unfortunately cuts down on the visibility of reconstruction projects.

¶5. (C) Van Weel briefed on Dutch MOD security efforts in Uruzgan, describing the Dutch ink blot strategy focused on two development stability zones and slowly expanding out into the province through reconstruction links. He said the Dutch have observed an increase in insurgency activity, including especially asymmetrical tactics. Van Weel estimated at least one IED attack per day in Uruzgan, and many avoided IED attacks via tips by the public. As a result of this increased activity, van Weel said Dutch forces have stopped expanding the ink blot strategy, and consolidated security into the two development stability zones. He added that Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) presence in Uruzgan was insufficient -- the Dutch had planned on 1,200 ANP, but only 80 ANP personnel are currently on duty locally.

¶6. (C) Gastright commended the Dutch for their efforts in Uruzgan, and noted praise for the Dutch from UN Special Envoy to Afghanistan Francesc Vendrell. Gastright highlighted USG reconstruction plans as part of the new USD 11.8 billion supplemental to Congress on Afghanistan, including building roads, power grids, and providing alternative livelihoods to poppy cultivation.

¶7. (C) Captain Hirst reviewed efforts through the Combined Security Transition Command (CSTC) to accelerate training to reach 70,000 and 82,000 troops levels for ANA and ANP, respectively, by the end of 2008. He stressed the importance of turning out a "quality" ANA/ANP product, and noted sustainment will be a challenge. Gastright welcomed EU plans for 500 mentors for training purposes, and referenced President Bush's recent statement regarding an additional U.S. brigade of mentors under Task Force Phoenix. Hirst also noted the importance of retaining ANA troops, possibly through a rotation schedule, and added that much of the USD 8.5 billion set aside for ANA/ANP training under the new Afghanistan supplemental will be devoted to providing these troops better equipment.

¶8. (C) Gastright referenced the USG's recent Afghan policy strategic review, and stressed the importance of strategic communications and enhancing Karzai's visibility in the southern provinces. Ward argued that governors should also "get the message out" in their respective provinces, and suggested little things like providing fuel and vehicles for official travel can go a long way toward enhancing the Karzai government's visibility. Gastright referenced the work of the Afghan National Coordination Communication Center, and passed to the Dutch one of the center's "weekly message" laminate cards. De Groot was impressed with the card and suggested the center coordinate with NATO so all ISAF contributors maintained a consolidated message.

¶9. (C) Jacobi raised local inability to absorb Dutch assistance; de Groot said the Dutch were dependent in many cases on adopting Afghan NGOs to work through. Ward praised the hard work done by PRTs, but acknowledged personnel on the

ground are not necessarily aware of nation-wide projects. He noted the availability of U.S. contractors in Uruzgan, and suggested Dutch development officers contact USAID personnel in Kabul to coordinate efforts; Jacobi and van Zomerem concurred.

¶10. (C) On eradication efforts, Jacobi said a Dutch team of agricultural experts recently visited Uruzgan to look at "creative ways" to support the Afghan government's eight counternarcotics pillars, while reinforcing alternative livelihoods at the local level. He said the team was still evaluating its findings, but the Dutch will no longer pursue income support through purchasing the poppy crop as an option. Jacobi acknowledged time was running out for 2007 eradication efforts, and suggested even some "symbolic eradication" by Gov. Monib would have been welcomed by the Dutch viewpoint. De Groot said the Dutch would be interested in buying alternative crops; however, these crops will take five years to grow, and a "bridge" was required in the meantime -- such as tribally-neutral eradication that does not unduly harm poor farmers. He emphasized this was what former Development Agnes van Ardenne had told Gov. Monib during her last visit. Ward agreed poor farmers should not be targeted, but also noted rich farmers rely on poor day-laborers to harvest the poppy -- alternatives should be found for these individuals, as well. Gastright suggested these discussions continue when INL PDAS Thomas Shweich visits The Hague at the end of March.

¶11. (C) Gastright asked for Dutch views on the Afghan reconciliation Program Takhim-e Solh (PTS), noting that the program takes enemy commanders off the field of battle. De Groot said the Dutch are interested, but felt the program as it currently stands amounts to more of a "car wash" -- enter dirty, exit clean -- than a reconciliation program. He said more needs to be done to re-energize the program and provide individuals that renounce the Taliban a stake in the legitimate government -- such as a position at the provincial level.

¶12. (C) On Pakistan, Gastright said President Musharraf was placing more pressure on Taliban leadership on his side of the border than ever before. He outlined USG plans for a USD 150 million supplemental to support federally administered tribal areas in Pakistan. Van Zomerem questioned whether Pakistani NGOs were sufficiently prepared to help such efforts; Ward noted long-standing ties with several Pakistani NGOs that were extremely reliable. He said the USG will encourage other countries to do more at the Pakistan Development Forum at the end of April; de Groot noted the Dutch were looking to team with the Brits in Baluchistan on tribal assistance efforts.

¶13. (C) Gastright noted that the Afghan refugee camps near Quetta in Pakistan are providing training and recruiting grounds for the Taliban, and asked for Dutch thoughts. Jacobi said the Dutch have heard conflicting signals from the Pakistani government and UNHCR regarding camp closures. He said the Dutch do not have a firm position, but would be reluctant to close the camps, and questioned whether there were citizenship issues at stake as some of these refugees had lived in Pakistan for thirty years. Van Weel noted that NATO Regional Commander South Dutch Gen. van Loon is concerned that closing the camps would lead to mass migration back to Afghanistan which could destabilize the region. Gastright said the camps as they currently stand are more dangerous than potential instability resulting from their closure -- we should work together to at least get the refugees out of these slums.

¶14. (C) De Groot noted the recent Australian decision to send new special forces to Uruzgan under Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). He welcomed the decision and fully agreed OEF needs to be there, especially in support of ISAF. But he said the Dutch were surprised by the decision to place these forces under OEF. While respecting Canberra's decision, he anticipated difficulty explaining this to the Dutch

parliament as the government prepares to make a pitch for maintaining a role in Afghanistan past August 2008. In other words, de Groot asked, how can you make the argument that reconstruction is working in the province when OEF forces are increasing? He asked for USG assistance in delineating rules of engagement and detainee policy regarding these new troops' interaction with ISAF. Hirst acknowledged a recent call from Dutch CHOD Gen. Berlijn to Gen. Pace on the matter, and said the USG welcomed the new Australian contribution. He understood the Dutch position, but noted that ISAF special forces command and control was still very immature, and doubted ISAF HQ would be able to absorb the new Australian contribution.

¶15. (C) De Groot raised one final issue regarding the alleged detention of Malim Farouk Khan -- a local official in Uruzgan -- at the Bagram Theater Internment Facility. He said Gov. Monib had approached Farouk regarding reconciliation prior to his detention, and that Dutch parliamentarians seized on the issue while recently in Afghanistan. (Note: Parliamentarians did not raise Farouk's status with the delegation. End note.) Gastright said he would look into the case.

#### Parliamentarian/Academic Breakfast -----

¶16. (SBU) Ambassador Arnall hosted a breakfast in honor of Deputy Assistant Secretary Gastright, including three Dutch parliamentarians who had recently returned from Afghanistan and Pakistan: Chantal Gill'ard (Labor) and Jules Kortenhorst (CDA) from parties in the current government, and parliamentarian foreign affairs committee chairperson Hans van Baalen (VVD). Other attendees included Professors Willem Vogel song (Leiden University) and Rob de Wijk (Clingendael Institute), and Afghan Honorary Counsel to the Netherlands Ehsan Turabaz. U.S. attendees included Ward, Captain Hirst, Captain Goldsmith and Grubb.

¶17. (SBU) Van Baalen suggested Pakistani President Musharraf can and should do more to fight Taliban on his side of the border, and said comments by Afghan government officials on Pakistan were extremely harsh. He noted that the new Dutch parliament will honor the previous government's two year deployment, but acknowledged the Dutch have been "very lucky"

in Uruzgan and questioned how Dutch casualties might affect possible deployment extension discussions later this year.

¶18. (SBU) Vogel song appreciated optimism, but suggested it was "too late" as radicalization had already significantly taken root in Afghanistan. He acknowledged progress in Uruzgan, but such progress was localized and had little influence over trouble spots like Helmand and Kandahar. Kortenhorst asked about ANA/ANP training, and questioned whether soldiers and police were receiving enough pay. Turabaz suggested a lack of coordination regarding international community efforts on rule of law.

¶19. (SBU) De Wijk questioned whether Karzai could govern outside of Kabul. While acknowledging the importance of reconstruction efforts, he also stressed the need to fight in order to provide the security necessary to carry out successful development projects. He questioned the British decision to broker a deal with local Taliban at the village of Musa Qala. He said "time is our own worst enemy," as the pressure is on to demonstrate real progress on reconstruction.

¶20. (SBU) Gastright said the Dutch are doing a solid job in Uruzgan -- Dutch parliamentarians should be proud of their deployment. That said, he acknowledged many challenges remain, and outlined plans for the new Afghanistan supplemental. Ward stressed the importance of getting Afghan communities to support reconstruction projects -- especially to deter the Taliban from targeting newly built schools or medical facilities. Both acknowledged the ill effects of casualties, but pointed to the tremendous progress already made in Afghanistan over the past few years, and added it was up to each participating partner to determine whether

providing a better future for the people of Afghanistan was worth the loss of life.

¶21. (SBU) Gastright and Ward stressed USG commitment to a "long-term" engagement in Afghanistan -- possibly a generation. Gastright said the Taliban in Pakistan are under more pressure there than ever before, and highlighted an additional USD 150 million supplemental for Pakistan aimed at eliminating the conditions that foment extremism. Ward described significant USG plans to assist the federally administered tribal areas in Pakistan.

¶22. (SBU) Gastright acknowledged difficulty with rule of law reform, but suggested that both the Afghan government and the international community were now better prepared to work on a comprehensive plan for judicial reform, beginning with a June conference in Rome. He pointed to recent progress through the Counternarcotics Tribunal and the Afghan Chief Justice's Anti-Corruption Commission. He also stressed that eradication was an Afghan government decision carried out provincially by its governors.

¶23. (SBU) Hirst outlined 2008 target goals for ANA/ANP training, and acknowledged challenges in ensuring that police in particular receive their salaries from the Ministry of Interior. Ward added that payment for most ministry officials was problematic, especially at the provincial level.

¶24. (U) DAS Gastright has cleared on this cable.  
ARNALL